

2005 White House Conference on Aging

Post-Event Summary Report

Name of Event: Think Tank on Elder Abuse and Neglect: Promoting National and Global Awareness and Effective Action

Date of Event: Saturday, September 17th, 2005

Location of Event: 10th International Conference on Family Violence: Working Together to End Abuse, San Diego, CA, September 16-21, 2005

Number of Persons Who Attended: 22 at the think tank; More than 100 participated in the Elder Abuse and Neglect track at the conference itself

Sponsoring Organization: The Family Violence and Sexual Assault Institute,
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PRIORITY ISSUE #1:

Develop strategies to promote Elder Justice and to respond to Elder Abuse and Neglect as a serious societal problem which requires meaningful and effective action on local, state, national and international levels.

ISSUES:

THE NEED FOR COMMON DEFINITIONS

- Inconsistent definitions of elder abuse and neglect
- Formulate a common definition of elder abuse and neglect
- Promote common definition(s) on a national level
- Common protocol for workers to use to define elder abuse and neglect

ELDER ABUSE AND NEGLECT IS A HEALTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE

- Paradigm shift – Need to recognize elder abuse as a public health issue as well as social and law enforcement issues

AWARENESS OF SELF-DETERMINATION

- Issues of self-determination, autonomy and capacity
- Issues of guardianship
- Understanding the response and coming to a consensus of what the response should be, specific to each agency, then, promoting it
- Capacity for self protection – need a culturally sensitive tool then can leverage it to streamline the work of Adult Protective Services (APS), law enforcement, and other agencies

THE NEED FOR ACCURATE STATISTICS

- Need data
- Difficult to find the data that are available
- Every year a national report is published on child abuse statistics – need a similar ability to report within elder abuse
- Add law enforcement piece to the APS report
- Propose an umbrella code for reporting elder abuse
- Part A and Part B crimes - UCR form works off of age
- State statistics are not transferable to national statistics
- Two separate issues: summarizing reported cases of elder abuse to APS and law enforcement, and also summarizing overall incidence and prevalence (telephone survey or similar research)
- Accurate information on the incidence and prevalence and can then support funding, programs, and promote awareness of the issue

RESPONSE SYSTEMS

- What responses are effective? What works? What is the best approach for what types of cases?
- Look at the ways in which we respond to elder abuse and neglect – what works best for whom?
- What are the responses to elder abuse?
- What are the entities/agencies that respond to elder abuse?
- How do those systems function?

AWARENESS OF SELF-DETERMINATION

- Issues of self-determination, autonomy and capacity
- Guardianship
- Understanding the response and coming to a consensus of what the response should be, specific to each entity; then, promoting it

- Capacity for self protection – need a culturally sensitive tool then can leverage it to streamline the work of APS, police

BARRIERS:

- We do not have accurate information or data concerning true incidences and prevalence of elder abuse and neglect on an annual basis
- We do not know what approaches and responses work best for different types of elder abuse and neglect cases is a lack research of the true incidence and prevalence of elder abuse.
- There is denial among elders and others in the population (media, general public) that elder abuse is a serious problem.
- There is a lack of interest in the issue, and people do not take on the problem on a personal level and have adopted a “not relevant to me” attitude. Society fails to understand that we are a village and need to look out for our neighbors, and we often fail to be proactive (individually and as agencies). A neighborhood watch is nonexistent, and there is a significant lack of senior advocates.
- There is a lack of willingness for involvement, time, and monetary resources.
- There is a language problem — people may hear words concerned with abuse, but do not connect it to the larger issue of elder abuse
- Society does not have a “can do” attitude about it. There are ageist attitudes and behaviors. The media contributes to negative stereotypes and unrealistic images of aging.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

- Incidences and prevalence of violence against women and children are reported each year; we need a similar system for elder abuse and a yearly report (part of Elder Justice Act)
- Develop the methodology to conduct a national survey on elder abuse incidence and prevalence
- Develop a response that recognizes the uniqueness and complexity of elder abuse by forming a think tank on practice to address gaps in direct services and intervention systems and to review and create standards for response delivery.
- Create a response system that is nationally uniform, that is built upon commonly accepted definitions, and that is interdisciplinary in nature and has a clinical assessment component.
- Advocate for the passage and funding of The Elder Justice Act, which will provide the funds and the framework for creating and promoting uniform definitions.
- Recognize the individual dynamics and consumer preferences in each situation (such as guidance in dealing with those with questionable capacity).
- Create a structure for research to evaluate the system in terms of effectiveness to identify gaps, overlaps, conflicts and needs for response protocols.
- Applied research on response systems is needed as well as strengthening research on the effectiveness of the responses
- After obtaining research about which interventions are effective, then promote those strategies that are validated and are empirically based
- We need to evaluate and strengthen the Adult Protective Services model by examining and analyzing responses, systems, and approaches to elder abuse and neglect

PRIORITY ISSUE #2:

Develop various vehicles and strategies for raising awareness and for building and maintaining momentum in addressing Elder Abuse and Neglect at local, state, national and international levels.

ISSUES:

NATIONAL ADVOCACY

- No national elder abuse movement
- Large scale emergencies expose the problem
- We need to take advantage of the stories and use them to bring awareness to the issue
- Look at finding the stories to get the attention of the media
- We must put a face on the problem
- Need the medical data to support the need for awareness

MEDIA AWARENESS

- Media portrayal of elder abuse
- Paradigm shift – recognize elder abuse as a public health issue as well as social and law enforcement issues
- Putting a face on the story can help people identify with the problem
- Stories that are in the media are the sensational ones
- Build a relationship with the media
- Challenge media to cover true elder abuse issues, not just sensational stories
- Need to create, strengthen, and improve local networks
- Unify the proactive work with the media
- Elder abuse as family violence – part of media campaign
- However, not every case of elder abuse is family violence
- Use radio outreach to empower the older adult population

ELDER ABUSE DAY

- US should proclaim a National Elder Abuse Awareness Day or Month
- US should take a lead role in International Elder Abuse Day, which is set for June 16
- White House Conference on Aging should take a lead role in promoting International Elder Abuse Day

BARRIERS:

- Within this system, there are many languages and different terms for similar issues and problems.
- Many approaches to preventing and intervening in cases of elder abuse have been borrowed from other fields and have been reconfigured to deal with elder abuse. These approaches were borrowed from movements such as the domestic violence and child abuse ones. Unfortunately, these responses are not specifically tailored to elder abuse, and the result has been a fragmented service delivery system in elder abuse.
- Systems are not integrated; therefore, they react to each other, not with each other.
- There is a lack of funds; funding designated to elder abuse awareness is very small compared to the enormity of the issue.
- Funding that is pre-categorized; in other words, money is often earmarked for specific purposes and is not available to respond to emerging needs.
- No nationally known advocacy groups have embraced the issue of elder abuse

- The media does not understand what elder abuse is, society does not want to recognize elder abuse as a problem
- Risk factors have not been well-defined.
- Accessing the appropriate services is often confusing and frustrating.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

- Add topics concerning elder abuse, neglect, and aging into curricula for journalism schools at national and international levels.
- Share resources; for example, get permission to release California's materials and Public Service Announcements both nationally and internationally to other organizations.
- Examine continuing education and licensure requirements, and add courses concerning active/productive aging for relevant disciplines (nursing, mental health, social work, etc.).
- Build coalitions with the media by having proactive, positive relationships with them.
- Strengthen the media advocacy to get the attention of the legislatures. This activity can be accomplished by inviting and involving media in events, and providing them with materials, media advisories, statistics, and press. Media campaign should target radio.
- Keep lists of victim stories by state to help inform media (i.e., prosecutions).
- Learn from previous projects.
- Make a commitment to a "7% solution." It has been demonstrated if an agency takes an issue and puts in 7% of their resources (time or money) to deal with the issue on a regular basis, it could have a huge effect on the issue.
- Personalize the issue of aging. Organize a national response to negative media.
- Involve senior advocacy groups (like AARP) to take the lead in promoting awareness regarding elder abuse.
- Reevaluate/reassess the current response to elder abuse and neglect through Adult Protective Services and other entities

PRIORITY ISSUE #3:

Build Support for the adoption of the proposed Resolution to Promote Against Elder Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation, and for assigning a high priority to the issue at the White House Conference on Aging in October.

BARRIERS:

- Ineffective advocacy.
- Disinclination of existing groups and organizations to embrace issues of elder abuse and neglect.
- Inadequate funding.
- Lack of knowledge regarding the best ways to frame the issue.
- Insufficient coalition building.
- Insufficient learning from other agencies and organizations.
- Fighting over scarce resources.
- Tendency to focus on differences, rather than finding a common ground.
- Ageism.
- Lack of awareness.
- Lack of accurate data to inform.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

- Create and fund a new position to focus on elder abuse in an organization (within an existing organization or in a newly created organization). For example, work with the Elder Justice Coalition and other existing organizations to promote a specific position that would serve as a liaison for national advocacy. Also, it would be beneficial to work with funding organizations to create a vision for the position and secure a 5 year financial commitment. This position can work to create committees on specific issues and tasks.
- Find a way to “get a seat” at the relevant tables (get a board member at AARP, National Governors Association, National Association of Counties, etc.). This task can be accomplished by either placing someone or recruiting elder abuse and neglect experts and advocates to become board members and to become involved in the number of organizations that are involved with elder abuse and neglect.
- Improve how we deliver the message (make it more palatable, frame the issue in terms that they can relate to, focus on positive, that is “reduce risk” vs. prevent elder abuse). Also, a media award should be created and we should develop a national spokesperson to represent the issues of elder abuse
- Work to get the issue of elder abuse as a priority at the White House Conference on Aging (WHCoA)
- Provide specific training and technical assistance for the delegates to the WHCoA.
- Place the issue of elder abuse on the agendas at state meetings of delegates.
- Provide a “talking point” document to all delegates, including a case study regarding elder abuse to put a face to the issue.
- Recommend support of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day on June 15th